

PN  
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# AFRICAN VERBS





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African proverbs.



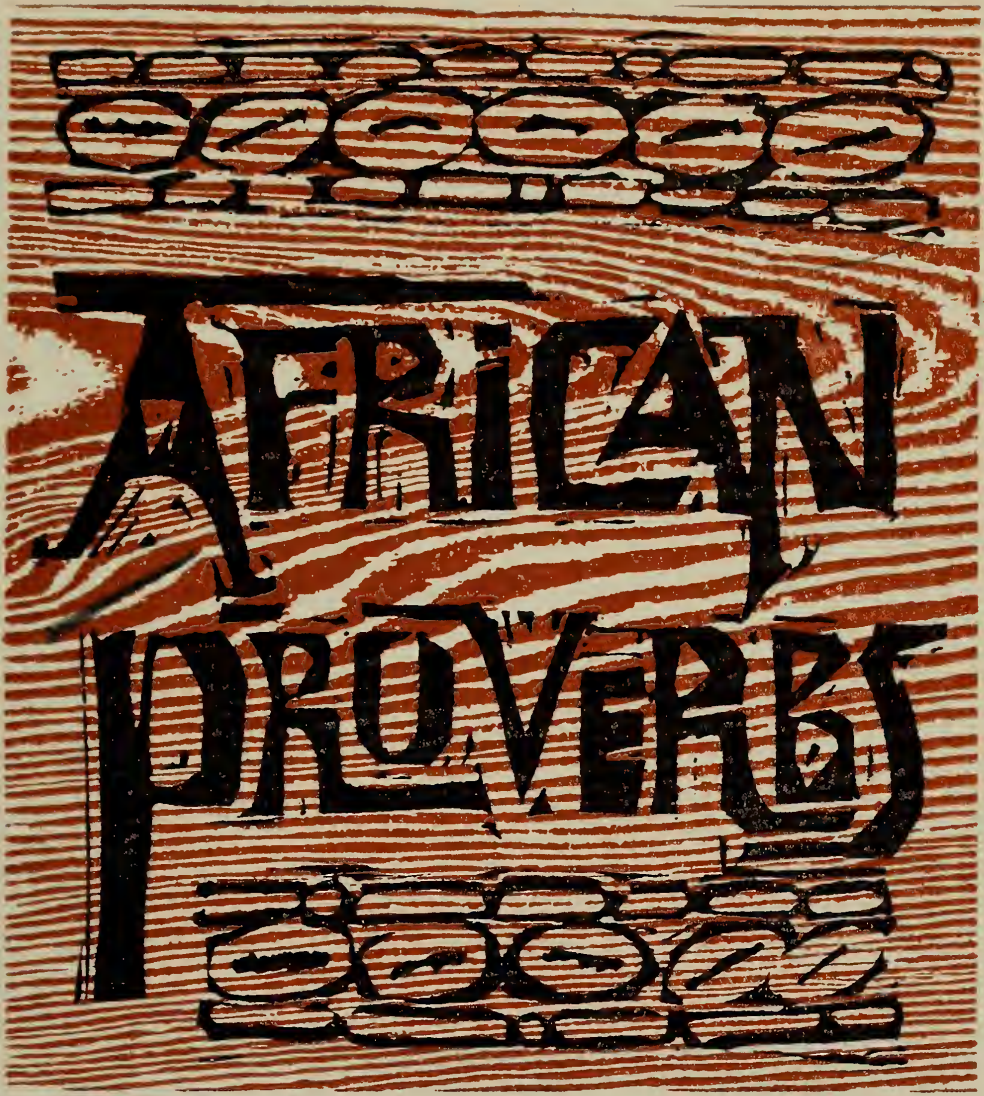
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CHARLOTTE (AND WOLF) LESLAU  
AND WITH  
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BY THE

PETER

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PRESS

# AFRICAN PROVERBS



3

Merry Xmas

~~from~~ to

Aunt Bess & Uncle Bill

from Vivian





# PROVERBS ON PROVERBS



Proverbs are the daughters of experience.  
(Sierra Leone)



A proverb is the horse of conversation:  
when the conversation lags, a  
proverb will revive it.  
(Yoruba)



A wise man who knows proverbs,  
reconciles difficulties.  
(Yoruba)





Rain beats a leopard's skin, but it does not wash out the spots.

Wood already touched by fire is not hard to set alight.

It is the wife who knows her husband.

Only when you have crossed the river, can you say the crocodile has a lump on his snout.

If you are in hiding, don't light a fire.

One falsehood spoils a thousand truths.

When a man is wealthy, he may wear an old cloth.



Do not call the forest that shelters you a jungle.



Hunger is felt by a slave and hunger is felt by a king.



The moon moves slowly, but it crosses the town.



The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people.



When the cock is drunk, he forgets about the hawk.



There is no medicine to cure hatred.



It's a bad child who does not take advice.

When a man is coming toward you, you  
need not say: "Come here."



Even though the old man is strong and  
hearty, he will not live forever.



When a king has good counselors, his  
reign is peaceful.



By the time the fool has learned the game,  
the players have dispersed.



The poor man and the rich man do not  
play together.



It is the calm and silent water that drowns  
a man.



When you follow in the path of your  
father, you learn to walk like him.



When a woman is hungry, she says, "Roast something for the children that they may eat."



What is bad luck for one man is good luck for another.



When the fool is told a proverb, its meaning has to be explained to him.



He who cannot dance will say: "The drum is bad."



One cannot both feast and become rich.



It is no shame at all to work for money.



Money is sharper than a sword.



It is the fools' sheep that break loose twice.

When you are rich, you are hated; when  
you are poor, you are despised.



It is Mr. Old-Man-Monkey who marries  
Mrs. Old-Woman-Monkey.



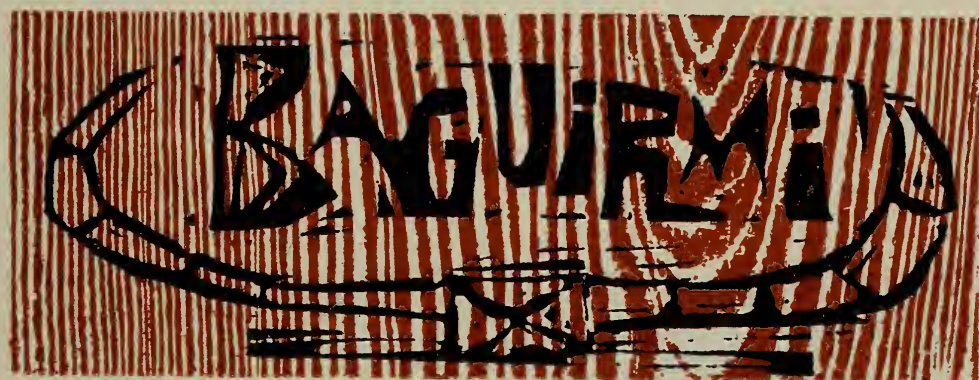
Fire and gunpowder do not sleep together.



No one tests the depth of a river with both  
feet.



Two small antelopes can beat a big one.



Do not try to cook the goat's young in  
the goat's milk.

The humble pay for the mistakes of their  
betters.



You are beautiful because of your possessions.



A man with too much ambition cannot  
sleep in peace.



It is best to bind up the finger before it is  
cut.



If the palm of the hand itches, it signifies  
the coming of great luck.



Sickness accompanies a waning moon; a  
new moon cures disease.



When the moon is not full, the stars shine  
more brightly.



He who hunts two rats, catches none.



If you burn a house, can you conceal the  
smoke?



A strawberry blossom will not sweeten dry  
bread.

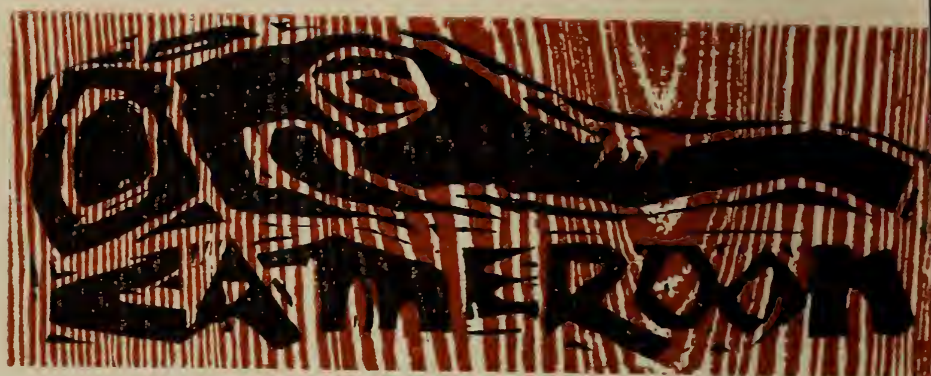


When the master is absent, the frogs hop  
into the house.



He who is bitten by a snake fears a lizard.





If you do not step on the dog's tail, he will  
not bite you.



When the vine entwines your roof, it is  
time to cut it down.



He who asks questions, cannot avoid the  
answers.



The flood takes him in, and the ebb takes  
him out.



She is like a road — pretty, but crooked.



By trying often, the monkey learns to jump  
from the tree.



The heart of the wise man lies quiet like  
limpid water.



The cricket cries, the year changes.



Thought breaks the heart.



Knowledge is better than riches.



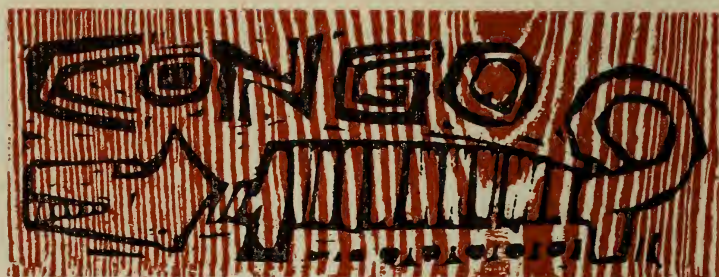
Rain does not fall on one roof alone.



An elephant will reach to the roof of the  
house.



A man's wealth may be superior to him.



Lower your head modestly while passing,  
and you will harvest bananas.



What is said over the dead lion's body,  
could not be said to him alive.



Children are the reward of life.



Being well dressed does not prevent one  
from being poor.



Little by little grow the bananas.



A pretty basket does not prevent worries.

No matter how full the river, it still wants to grow.



Do not dispose of the monkey's tail before he is dead.



Love is like a baby: it needs to be treated tenderly.



The teeth are smiling, but is the heart?



Great events may stem from words of no importance.



You do not teach the paths of the forest to an old gorilla.



A little subtleness is better than a lot of force.



Two birds disputed about a kernel, when a third swooped down and carried it off.

The son shoots a leopard; the father is proud.



Man is like palm-wine: when young, sweet but without strength; in old age, strong but harsh.



Mothers-in-law are hard of hearing.



If you tell people to live together, you tell them to quarrel.



The friends of our friends are our friends.



Wood may remain ten years in the water, but it will never become a crocodile.



Death does not sound a trumpet.



Let him speak who has seen with his eyes.

When the bee comes to your house, let her  
have beer; you may want to visit the bee's  
house some day.



No matter how long the night, the day is  
sure to come.



He who is free of faults, will never die.



A single bracelet does not jingle.



To love someone who does not love you,  
is like shaking a tree to make the dew drops  
fall.



Sleep is the cousin of death.

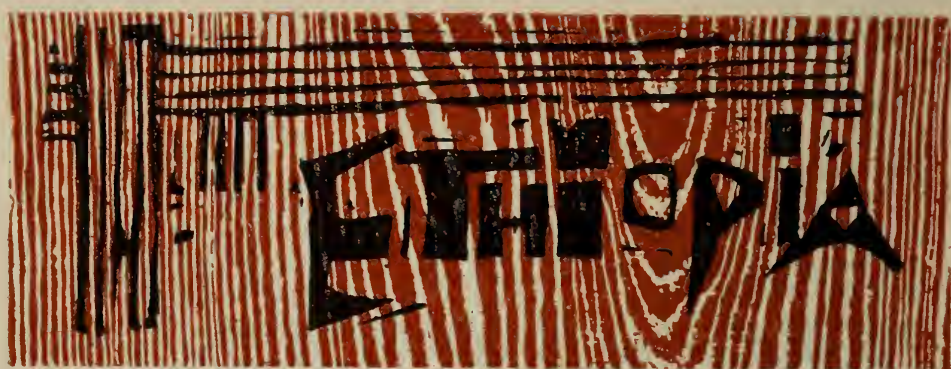


The flesh of a young animal tastes flat.



Those who are absent are always wrong.





To one who does not know, a small garden  
is a forest.



When one is in love, a cliff becomes a  
meadow.



A fool looks for dung where the cow never  
browsed.



The cattle is as good as the pasture in  
which it grazes.



Evil enters like a needle and spreads like an  
oak tree.



A close friend can become a close enemy.

What is inflated too much, will burst into fragments.



Restless feet may walk into a snake pit.



A coward sweats in water.



Snake at your feet — a stick at your hand!



The witness of a rat is another rat.



He who learns, teaches.



A fool will pair an ox with an elephant!



One who runs alone cannot be outrun by another.



Cactus is bitter only to him who tastes of it.

The frog wanted to be as big as the elephant, and burst.



One who recovers from sickness, forgets about God.



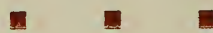
Termites live underground.



Woman without man is like a field without seed.



If a friend hurts you, run to your wife.



If the heart is sad, tears will flow.



Unless you call out, who will open the door?



Her horns are not too heavy for the cow.

There is no one who became rich because he broke a holiday, and no one who became fat because he broke a fast.



When the heart overflows, it comes out through the mouth.



You cannot build a house for last year's summer.



A partner in the business will not put an obstacle to it.



When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.



He who digs too deep for a fish, may come out with a snake.



Confiding a secret to an unworthy person is like carrying grain in a bag with a hole.

A loose tooth will not rest until it's pulled out.



The dog I bought, bit me; the fire I kindled, burned me.



A blade won't cut another blade; a cheat won't cheat another cheat.



If one is not in a hurry, even an egg will start walking.



If relatives help each other, what evil can hurt them?



A home without a woman is like a barn without cattle.



Sitting is being crippled.



The fool speaks, the wise man listens.



A cat may go to a monastery, but she still remains a cat!



I have a cow in the sky, but cannot drink her milk.



Dine with a stranger but save your love for your family.



A too modest man goes hungry.



If you offend, ask for pardon; if offended, forgive.



He who conceals his disease cannot expect to be cured.



A fool and water will go the way they are diverted.



Where there is no shame, there is no honor.

A silly daughter teaches her mother how to bear children.



Advise and counsel him; if he does not listen, let adversity teach him.



Anticipate the good so that you may enjoy it.



Clothes put on while running come off while running.



A cow gave birth to a fire: she wanted to lick it, but it burned; she wanted to leave it, but she could not because it was her own child.



One scoops with a scoop.



Living is worthless for one without a home.

When one sets a portion for oneself, usually it is not too small.



He who wants to barter, usually knows what is best for him.



She who does not yet know how to walk, cannot climb a ladder.



When a fool is cursed, he thinks he is being praised.



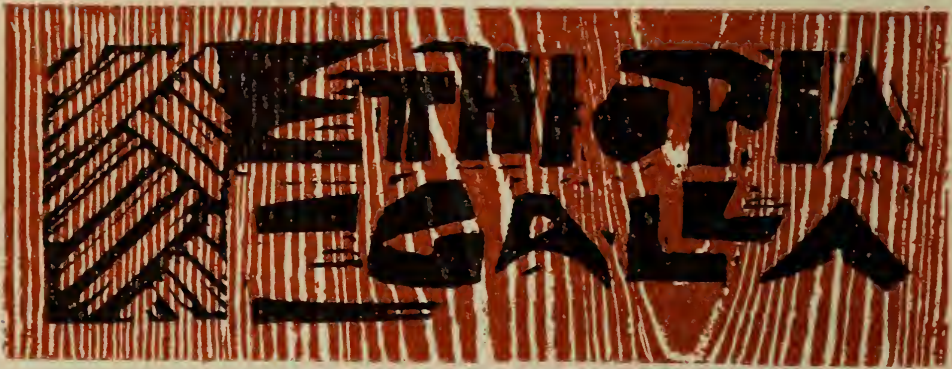
It is easy to become a monk in one's old age.



Singing "Halleluia" everywhere does not prove piety.



Saying that it's for her child, she gets herself a loaf of bread.



What has been blown away, cannot be found again.



The fool is thirsty in the midst of water.



Even over cold pudding, the coward says:  
“It will burn my mouth.”



What one hopes for is always better than what one has.



A single stick may smoke, but it will not burn.



As the wound inflames the finger, so thought inflames the mind.



He who lives with an ass, makes noises like  
an ass.



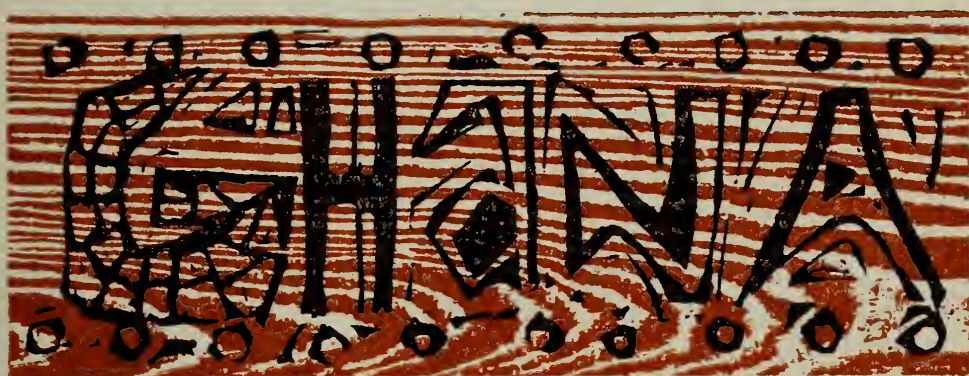
If a man comes, a quarrel comes.



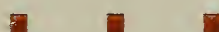
Move your neck according to the music.



One is born, one dies; the land increases.



If there were no elephant in the jungle,  
the buffalo would be a great animal.



A crab does not beget a bird.



If you find no fish, you have to eat bread.





One camel does not make fun of the other  
camel's hump.



The man on his feet carries off the share of  
the man sitting down.



Around a flowering tree, one finds many  
insects.



To make preparations does not spoil the  
trip.



He who has done evil, expects evil.



A good deed is something one returns.

He who does not cultivate his field, will die of hunger.



A cow that has no tail should not try to chase away flies.



The toad likes water, but not when it's boiling.



Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.



No matter how long the night, the day is sure to follow.



When a needle falls into a deep well, many people will look into the well, but few will be ready to go down after it.



To have two eyes is cause for pride; but to have one eye is better than to have none.



Save your fowl before it stops flapping.



Too much discussion means a quarrel.



Mutual affection gives each his share.



Mutual gifts cement friendship.



It takes two to make a quarrel.



Two flavors confuse the palate.



He who talks incessantly, talks nonsense.

A little leaven smoothes away the whole lump.



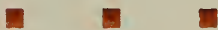
*Their* mosquito won't bite me.



A bad son gives a bad name to his mother.



After a foolish deed comes remorse.



A man who has once been tossed by a buffalo, when he sees a black ox, thinks it's another buffalo.



He who receives a gift does not measure.



He who does not know one thing knows another.



Do not say the first thing that comes to your mind.



A white dog does not bite another white dog.



Try this bracelet: if it fits you wear it; but if it hurts you, throw it away no matter how shiny.



When you take a knife away from a child, give him a piece of wood instead.



He who is unable to dance says that the yard is stony.



One finger alone cannot kill even a louse.



Because a man has injured your goat, do not go out and kill his bull.



A man who continually laments is not heeded.



Talking with one another is loving one another.



Absence makes the heart forget.



If a dead tree falls, it carries with it a live one.



Virtue is better than wealth.



There is no phrase without a double meaning.



Hearts do not meet one another like roads.

One does not slaughter a calf before its  
mother's eyes.



There is no cure that does not cost.



Seeing is different from being told.



It is the duty of children to wait on elders,  
and not the elders on children.



Thunder is not yet rain.



Soon found soon lost.



Home affairs are not talked about on the  
public square.



Good millet is known at the harvest.



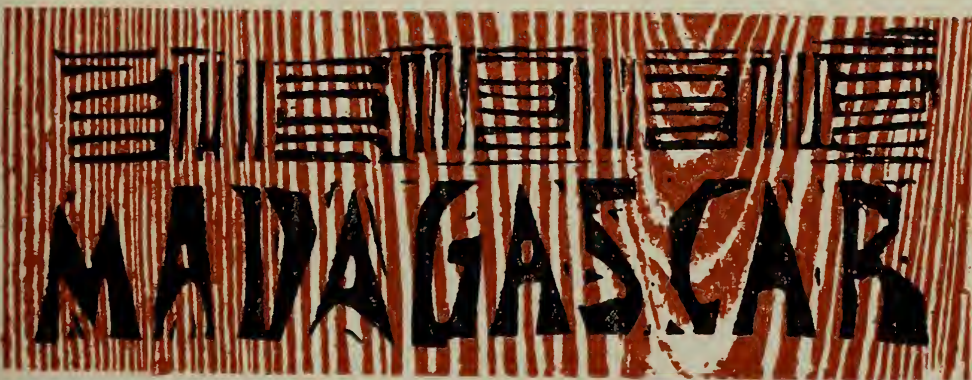
A little rain each day will fill the rivers to overflowing.



Do not measure the timbers for your house in the forest.



Though the palm tree in the jungle is big, who knows how big its yield will be?



Indecision is like the stepchild: if he doesn't wash his hands, he is called dirty; if he does, he is wasting the water.

The end of an ox is beef, and the end of a  
lie is grief.



Don't kick a sleeping dog.



Don't be so much in love that you can't  
tell when the rain comes.



Sorrow is like a precious treasure, shown  
only to friends.



Love is like young rice: transplanted, still  
it grows.



An eel that was not caught is as big as your  
thigh.



The dog's bark is not might, but fright.



Marriage is not a fast knot, but a slip knot.



Life is a shadow and a mist; it passes quickly by, and is no more.



Don't take another mouthful before you have swallowed what is in your mouth.



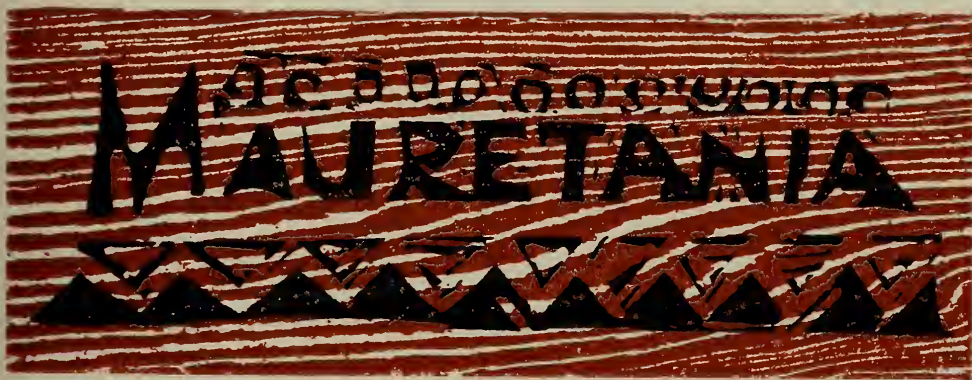
Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you.



Let your love be like the misty rain, coming softly, but flooding the river.



If you try to cleanse others — like soap, you will waste away in the process!



It is only the water that is spilt; the calabash is not broken!



He who wears too fine clothes, shall go  
about in rags.



Before eating, open thy mouth.



Too large a morsel chokes the child.



One must talk little, and listen much.



Not all the flowers of a tree produce fruit.



Two eyes see better than one.



He who loves money must labor.



If you watch your pot, your food will not  
burn.



Before one cooks, one must have the meat.

A cutting word is worse than a bowstring;  
a cut may heal, but the cut of the tongue  
does not.



He who begins a conversation, does not  
foresee the end.



A proverb is the horse of conversation:  
when the conversation lags, a proverb re-  
vives it.



A wise man who knows his proverbs can  
reconcile difficulties.



He who marries a beauty marries trouble.

Ashes fly back into the face of him who  
throws them.



He who does not mend his clothes will soon  
have none.



There is no medicine against old age.



He who boasts much can do little.



You cannot shave a man's head in his  
absence.



The egg becomes a cock.



Familiarity breeds contempt; distance  
breeds respect.



The rat cannot call the cat to account.



He who wishes to barter, does not like his  
own property.



Seeing is better than hearing.



Evil knows where evil sleeps.



He who is sick will not refuse medicine.



A wealthy man will always have followers.



The dying man is not saved by medicine.



Some birds avoid the water, ducks seek it.

The day on which one starts out is not the time to start one's preparations.



The house roof fights the rain, but he who is sheltered ignores it.



Since he has no eyes, he says that eyes smell bad.



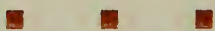
He who is being carried does not realize how far the town is.



He who runs from the white ant may stumble upon the stinging ant.



The stone in the water does not know how hot the hill is, parched by the sun.



The one-eyed man thanks God only when he sees a man who is totally blind.



Someone else's legs do you no good in traveling.



Fine words do not produce food.



If the bull would throw you, lie down.



The bird flies high, but always returns to earth.



If you rise too early, the dew will wet you.



When the mouse laughs at the cat, there is a hole nearby.



Children of the same mother do not always agree.



What the child says, he has heard at home.

If you fill your mouth with a razor, you  
will spit blood.



Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is  
worse.



Before shooting, one must aim.



He who has goods can sell them.



When one is in trouble, one remembers  
God.



Meat does not eat meat.



Before healing others, heal thyself.



A shepherd does not strike his sheep.

A bird can drink much, but an elephant  
drinks more.



Horns do not grow before the head.



If the stomach-ache were in the foot, one  
would go lame.



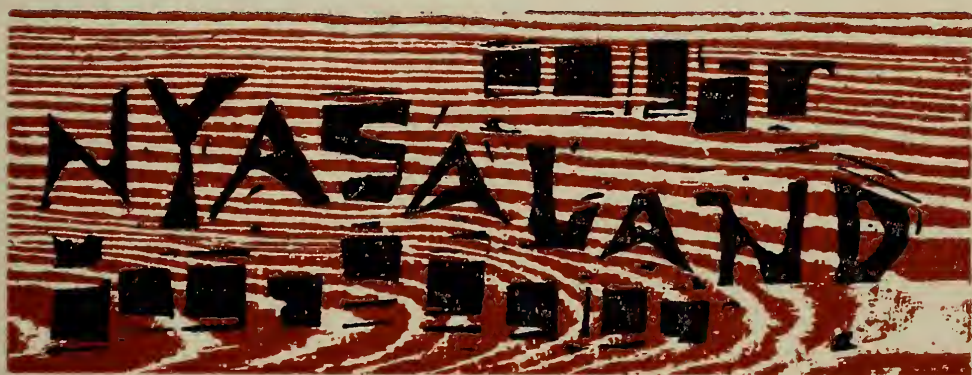
Time destroys all things.



Earth is the queen of beds.



Little is better than nothing.



One little arrow does not kill a serpent.

Do not be like the mosquito that bites the owner of the house.



Wisdom is like mushrooms that come after you have finished eating (too late!).



If your mouth turns into a knife, it will cut off your lips.



A borrowed fiddle does not finish a tune.



The monkey does not see his own hind parts; he sees his neighbors'.





When the leopard is away, his cubs are eaten.



In a court of fowls, the cockroach never wins his case.



If you are building a house and a nail breaks, do you stop building, or do you change the nail?



Proverbs are the daughters of experience.



You set the trap after the rat has passed.





Spilled water is better than a broken jar.



Nobody tells all he knows.



The cow steps on the calf, but she does not hate it.



It is better to travel alone than with a bad companion.



Three kinds of people die poor: those who divorce, those who incur debts, and those who move around too much.



The heart is not a knee that can be bent.

If you speak, speak to him who understands you.



He may say that he loves you. Wait and see what he does for you!



The opportunity that God sends does not wake up him who is asleep.



To spend the night in anger is better than to spend it in repentance.



When you know who his friend is, you know who he is.



The truth is like gold: keep it locked up and you will find it exactly as you first put it away.



A healthy ear can stand hearing sick words.

If a centipede loses a leg, it does not prevent him from walking.



If your son laughs when you scold him, you ought to cry, for you have lost him; if he cries, you may laugh, for you have a worthy heir.



If a little tree grows in the shade of a larger tree, it will die small.



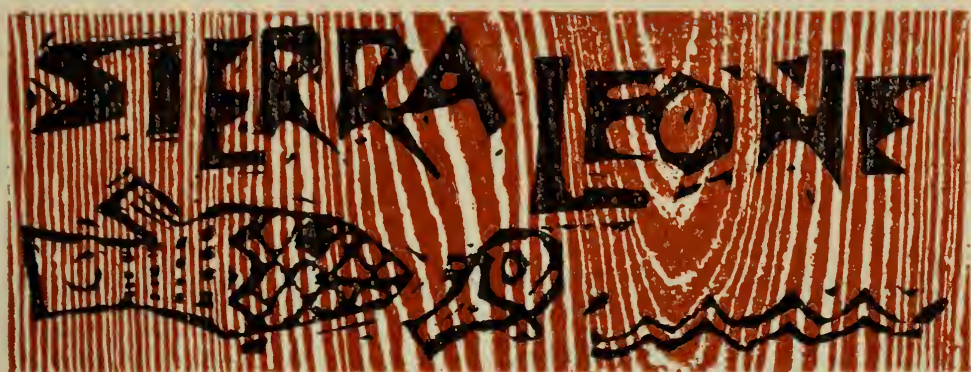
An intelligent enemy is better than a stupid friend.



Don't try to make someone hate the person he loves, for he will still go on loving, but he will hate you.



It is better to be loved than feared.



A paddle here, a paddle there, — the canoe  
stays still.



However full the house, the hen finds a  
corner to lay in.



Only a monkey understands a monkey.



If you climb up a tree, you must climb  
down the same tree.



A big fish is caught with big bait.



He who refuses a gift will not fill his barn.



Quarrels end, but words once spoken  
never die.



If a single hair has fallen from your head,  
you are not yet bald.



He who upsets a thing should know how  
to rearrange it.



A cow must graze where she is tied.



An orange never bears a lime.



Invite some people into your parlor, and  
they will come into your bedroom.



The sweet rice is eaten quickly.



An elephant's head is no load for a child.



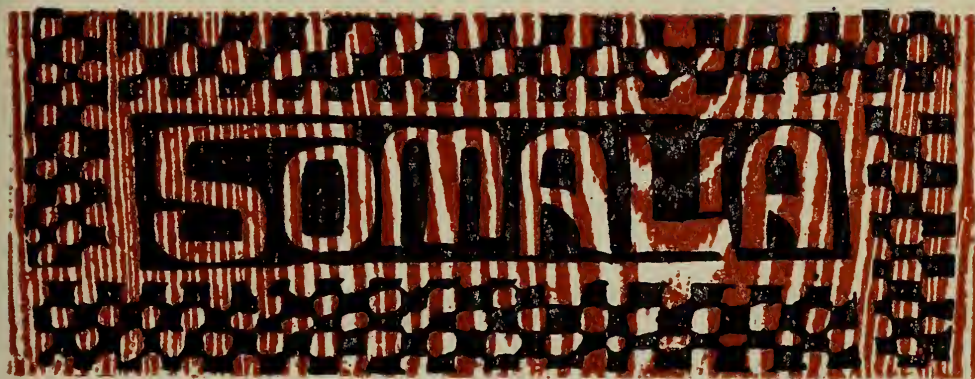
Do not tell the man who is carrying you  
that he stinks.



It is the wandering dog that finds the old  
bone.



To try and to fail, is not laziness.



In the ocean, one does not need to sow  
water.



He who does not shave you, does not cut  
you.



A thief is always under suspicion.

To be without a friend, is to be poor,  
indeed.



A coward is full of precaution.



Poverty is slavery.



Wisdom does not come overnight.



Do not walk into a snake-pit with your  
eyes open.



Water and milk do not mix.



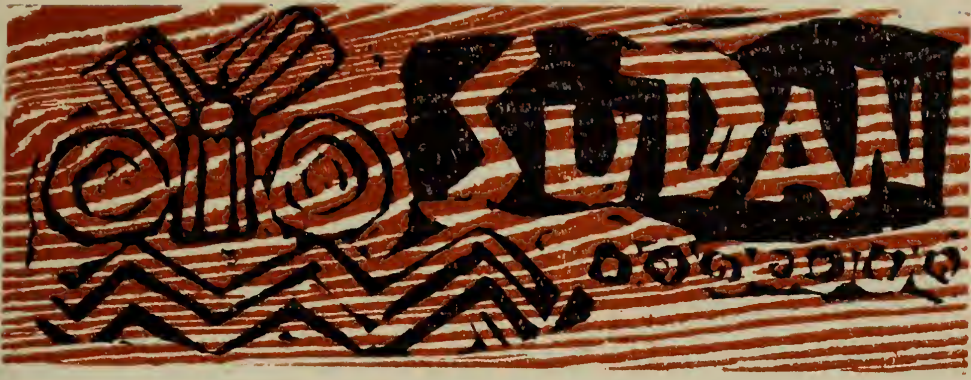
One cannot count on riches.



A brother is like one's shoulder.



Where I make a living, there is my home.



A termite can do nothing to a stone save  
lick it.



A little shrub may grow into a tree.



Let rats shoot arrows at each other.



Do not mend your neighbor's fence be-  
fore looking to your own.

A sheep cannot bleat in two different places at the same time.



Events follow one another like the days of the week.



Even the night has ears.



Everything has an end.



We start as fools and become wise through experience.



Even flies have ears.



Do not make a dress for the baby before the child is born.



In the world all things are two and two.





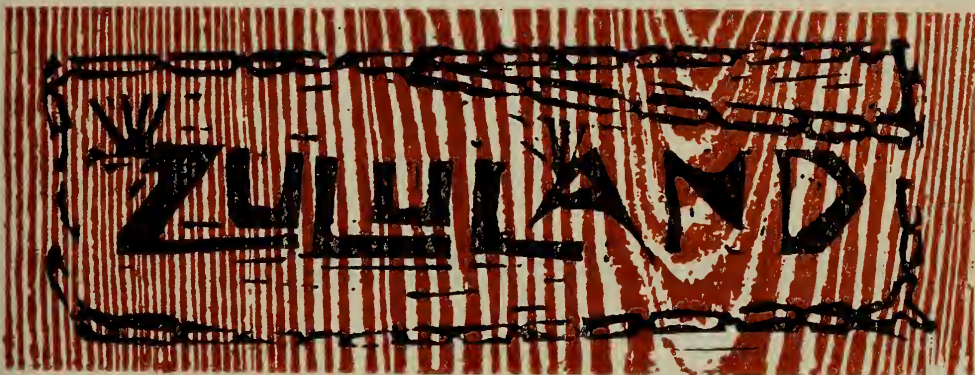
A roaring lion kills no game.



Only a fool tries to jump fire.



With wealth one wins a woman.



Do not leave your host's house, throwing  
mud in his well.



A word uttered cannot be taken back.



When the man is away, the monkey eats  
up the maize and enters the hut.



A half loaf is better than no bread.



Do not call to a dog with a whip in your  
hand.



The horse who arrives early gets good  
drinking water.



A fault confessed is half redressed.



One does not cross a river without getting  
wet.



Darkness conceals the hippopotamus.



A horse has four legs, yet it often falls.

The most beautiful fig may contain a worm.



Without life, there is nothing.



Follow the customs or flee the country.



The rich are always complaining.



Even an ant may harm an elephant.



Copying everybody else all the time, the monkey one day cut his throat.





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# AFRIC PROVE

